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Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. LEAHY).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

O God, our refuge and strength, give us reverence for Your greatness. Guide our Senators around the pitfalls of their work, enabling them to have hearts sustained by Your peace. May they surrender their will to You, as they trust You to direct their steps.

Lord, give them the wisdom to receive Your reproof with the understanding that You chastise those whom You love for their good.

Make their lives productive for the glory of Your Name. And, Lord, bless Ukraine.

We pray in the Name of our redeemer. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

HONORING OUR PROMISE TO ADDRESS COMPREHENSIVE TOXICS ACT OF 2021—Resumed

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of H.R. 3967, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 3967) to improve health care and benefits for veterans exposed to toxic substances, and for other purposes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. BALDWIN). The Senator from Vermont. Mr. LEAHY. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. SMITH). Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The majority leader is recognized.

H.R. 3967

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, today is a historic, long-awaited day for our Nation's veterans. In a few moments, the Senate is finally going to pass the PACT Act—the most significant expansion of healthcare benefits for our veterans in generations. It is officially called the SFC Heath Robinson Honoring our PACT Act because Heath Robinson was one of the many who succumbed to the poisons of toxins that he was exposed to fighting for America.

For too long, our Nation's veterans have faced an absurd indignity: They enlisted to serve our country, went abroad in good health, and came back, only to get sick from toxic exposure endured while in the line of duty.

As many as 3½ million veterans have been affected by burn pits since 9/11.

Yet approximately 80 percent of all disability claims connected to burn pits have been rejected by the VA. So many of our veterans have been fought by the VA after they fought for us, as they try to get healthcare benefits. Many of them had to hire lawyers just to prove their illnesses and then do a complicated legal dance to show what everyone knew: that toxic exposure from burn pits caused all kinds of cancers and other diseases. That was so, so wrong. Indignity. The callousness of forcing veterans who got sick as they were fighting for us because of exposure to these toxins, to have to fight for years in the VA to get the benefits they deserved—well, that will soon be over, praise God.

To these American heroes who have carried on without the benefits they deserve, I have one thing to say: No more. Today, the Senate finally takes action to right this profound wrong.

The PACT Act will finally change outdated rules at the VA that have been in effect for far too long that prevent our veterans from getting the care they need to treat health complications caused by burn pits. It will expand eligibility for VA medical care to make sure veterans get the help they need.

There is even more good news in the PACT Act. It is not just about burn pits, as important as they are. The PACT Act will expand coverage of health issues exacerbated by Agent Orange, which, over the years, I have strongly pushed for in this Chamber.

I want to give deep thanks to Senators TESTER and MORAN, who worked for months to push this bill over the finish line. Their leadership on this issue has been extraordinary.

I want to thank my colleagues. This is another bipartisan action that is accomplishing something very significant, and I want to thank my colleagues from both sides of the aisle who supported the bill through its consideration.

● This “bullet” symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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